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Parker, Simon Frank orcid.org/0000-0001-7967-817X (2016) *The Resistible Rise of Italy's Metropolitan Regions : The Politics of Sub-National Government Reform in Postwar Italy*. In: Keil, Roger, Boudreau, Julie-Anne, Hammel, Pierre and Kipfer, Stefan, (eds.) *Governing Cities Through Regions*. Wilfred Laurier Press , Waterloo, Ontario , pp. 337-354.

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CHAPTER 17

The Resistible Rise of Italy's Metropolitan Regions**The Politics of Sub-National Government Reform in Postwar Italy¹**

Simon Parker

Introduction

MUCH OF THE LITERATURE of the 1990s and 2000s on urban and regional governance was dominated by the themes of globalization and state re-scaling, which were identified as the twin drivers of a re-territorialization of governance at the metropolitan-regional scale (Cox 1993; Cox 1997; Swyngedouw and Cox 1997; Brenner 1998a; Brenner 1998b; MacLeod and Goodwin 1999; MacLeod 2001; Swyngedouw and Baeten 2001; Brenner 2002; Keil 2003; Brenner 2004). A review of the actual “on the ground” transformation of cities and regions into strong state actors with considerable powers of political and economic sovereignty reveals a much more complicated picture, however. Indeed because of its essentially normative and pluralist conceptualization it is hard to identify where “new regionalism” really has emerged even in the European Union, where for a time Jacques Delors’s enthusiastic vision of “a Europe of the Regions” offered the promise of a new era of politically and economically assertive sub-national governments (Scott 2009).

A surge of research articles and reports in the 1990s pointed to what can only be described as “the return of the region” as a territorial scale of key importance to students of economic geography, political science and public administration, urban and regional sociology, planning, international relations, and related disciplines (Harrison 2008a, 2008b). The reasons for this upsurge in interest differed across the disciplinary fields, however. For economic geographers the key work of Michael Storper, Ed

Soja, and Allen Scott (Scott and Soja 1996; Scott, Agnew et al. 2001; Scott and Storper 2003; Scott 2011; Soja 2014) on regions as centres of economic production built on that of writers such as Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift on Post-Fordist agglomeration economies (Amin 1990, Amin and Thrift 1992). Distinctive sub-national patterns of industrial production, innovation, and design with clear geographical “clustering” had been identified by Bagnasco (1977), Sabel and Piore (1984), and Sabel and Amin (1994), notably in the so-called “Third Italy” but with similar industrial district features in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg in Germany (Lechner and Dowling 1999, Semlinger 1993) and Catalonia and Euskadia (the Basque Country) in Spain (Santisteban 2006).

However, as Gordon, Harding, and Harloe argue in this volume, the tendency to attach primacy to the forces of globalization as the main agent of the re-scaling of territorial governance in a metropolitan direction provides, “...an insufficient basis for understanding how and why metropolitan governance is clearly emerging in some places, but not in others; how its form varies between places; how it succeeds *and* how it fails—and so on.” In the context of Italy, strongly integrated export-led regional economies and highly territorialized political subcultures are important factors in the contestation around regionalism and metropolitan government. Thus, despite the appearance of significant reterritorializing reforms in the 1970s and more recently in the 1990s and 2000s, the re-scaling of government in Italy has been more defined by endogenous concerns surrounding the relative advantage to be gained by entrenched political and economic interests than an exogenous “post-Fordist” adaptation to the new state spaces that might potentially result from the reconfiguration of global capital’s spatial fix in an Italian economy, which, despite its membership of the Eurozone, remains remarkably “sheltered” by international comparison (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi 2007).

Centre and Periphery in Italy: A Brief History

Since the foundation of the modern Italian state in 1861, the one issue that has traditionally united nearly all the political factions has been that “the rule of the parties” (in Italian, the *partitocrazia*) should supersede “the reason of state,” and this is why it is so crucial to understand the primacy of politics in any discussion of the reform of the apparatus of government in Italy. For most of its history, “regional Italy,” to quote Metternich, existed as a geographical expression, while the ancient form of territorial government, the commune (*comune*), and to a lesser extent the province (*provincia*), was the main point of political reference and

source of collective identity. Although a regional dimension did exist prior to unification, this was generally a matter of imperial and ecclesiastical convenience rather than a genuine territorial expression of a distinct culture or “ethnos.” The delineation of regions in Italy in the nineteenth century was, as Pacini and Bramanti have termed it, “decided hurriedly and certainly not on the basis of criteria such as efficient governability and the economic and social needs of the territory” (Pacini and Bramanti 1992). The latter part of this statement might equally well describe the much-delayed implementation of the “ordinary regions” in 1970, conceded by a reluctant Christian Democrat party in return for the coalition support of the Italian Socialist Party.

While many in northern Italy in recent decades have shown dissatisfaction with their *national* political space, this does not necessarily imply that the *region* provokes stronger feelings of political and cultural identification than other institutions, or that it represents an area of internal social, economic, and political homogeneity. Nor is it necessarily true that the performance of administrators and politicians at the regional level was any better than that of those at the national level. Given that the fifteen “ordinary” regions only began to assume greater importance in the 1970s, by which time the *partitocrazia* was firmly entrenched, the regions became not so much the harbingers of a new way of doing politics or a force for subsidiarity, but rather, as Gianfranco Miglio put it, “the most conservative part of the old and corrupt unitary state” (Miglio 1999: 65). Therefore, as Murphy advocates, it is important to reflect both on how regions are perceived and understood by their inhabitants and “how and why that understanding has changed over time” (Murphy 1991: 24).

Although dissatisfaction with all levels of government in Italy is higher than the European average, opinion surveys consistently find a lower level of dissatisfaction with sub-national government. But this needs to be seen in the context of a generally low opinion of local and national government among Italians and much higher levels of support for the EU, public education, the system of justice, the Catholic Church, the police and the armed forces, and the President of the Republic.² However, because space does not allow an extensive discussion of the historical development of “autonomous” territorial government in Italy, I propose to confine my analysis to the rise of “ethno-regionalist” autonomism in the late 1980s and 1990s; the impact of the local government reforms of the 1990s and the centre-left constitutional reforms (1999–2001); the implementation of limited regional devolution under the centre right Bossi-Berlusconi administration in the 2000s; the increasing importance of regional economic space in the reconfiguration of territorial government; and the most recent creation of

new metropolitan authorities under the centre-left government of Matteo Renzi. In concluding, I try to situate the Italian experience of regional and metropolitan government reform within a broader discussion of state re-scaling by insisting on the continued importance of organized politics in any reconfiguration of territorial governance in the Italian case.

“Fear of Falling”: Territorial Identity and the Demand for Local Autonomy

On the face of it, the Italian experience seems to support the contention that the restructuring of sub-national levels of governance represents one of the key responses made by a national government to the managerial and economic problems thrown up by processes of globalization. Here we have a case in which there has been substantial devolution and decentralization of powers and resources to the regional and metropolitan scales at a pace that has quickened since the 1970s and led to significant growth in sub-national economic development and related functions, particularly at the regional level (Parker 2006).

Toward the end of the 1980s, the newly-rich of the northern industrial districts began to suffer from what Tambini refers to as “a fear of falling” or “an insecurity born of economic uncertainty in the globalizing economy” (Tambini, 2004: 30). Neglected by its dominant party, *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, or DC), in favour of the large industries of the northwest and the south, the provincial north became an area that felt “economically central and politically peripheral” (Diamanti, 2001: 296). Over the course of the 1980s, regional leagues demanding greater autonomy sprang up across northern Italy, with particular points of strength in provincial Veneto and Lombardy, i.e., “the North of small businesses and Catholic political traditions” (Diamanti, 1996: 125). Following the first seat gains in national elections of the *Lega Veneta* in 1983 and the *Lega Lombarda* in 1987, the leagues were to enjoy a swift rise that would see the result of their fusion, the *Lega Nord*, become the second party in Lombardy, the Veneto, and Piedmont, and the third in Liguria, at the parliamentary elections of 1992.

As Cento Bull and Gilbert assert, any understanding of the *Lega Nord* must be based on recognition of the nexus between the industrial districts of the provincial north of Italy and the emergence of the federalist Leagues. They argue that the *Lega* “took on the representation of the interests of a local model of economic development” when the DC was no longer able to do so effectively (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 102). Although derided by the established “system” parties, the *Lega* was expressing (albeit in populist terms) the needs of a specific territorial socio-economic

constituency and many of the issues raised first by the Lega—such as the need for federal and fiscal reform—have since been embraced by those who originally bristled at the very word “federalism,” most notably the dominant political figure of the Second Italian Republic—Silvio Berlusconi.

The Lega Nord, as a vocal opponent of the “Roman state” and its southern clientalist electoral base, succeeded in pushing the question of greater subnational autonomy up the political agenda. At the same time, the dramatic collapse of the major parties amidst the corruption scandals of the *Tangentopoli* period helped create the conditions by which changes at the subnational level would also become expedient for the governing class (Gundle and Parker 1996). The early 1990s would see a number of important reforms in this area, the most important being Law 81/1993 that allowed for the direct election of the mayor over two rounds of voting and, through a “bonus” for the winning coalition, a guarantee of an absolute majority. The mayor was also given the power to appoint the members of the council executive and this, while still leaving the mayor with the task of keeping the different parties in the victorious coalition happy, has helped to promote a greater degree of efficiency and accountability. The enhancement of the powers and autonomy of city mayors under these reforms has even led one commentator to refer to the new municipal polity as “semi-presidentialist” (Fabbrini, 2001).

While the level of political interest and contestation increased with the introduction of the direct election of city mayors and the reorganization of communal administration (Law 142/1990), later incorporated into the so-called Bassanini II law 127/1997, the boost to the institutional legitimacy of larger city authorities which reformers hoped would result has failed to materialize. Law 142/1990 certainly constituted a re-territorialization of government in that it gave elected local authorities the right to devise their own statutes, to initiate inter-authority cooperation, and to directly elect the head of the political executive—all of which were subsequently adopted by Constitutional Law 1/1999 with respect to regional government. As a result of these reforms the commune was re-established as the basic unit of local government, having responsibility for all the functions and services relating to the population of its territory other than those explicitly attributed to other authorities (Vandelli 2000: 98). In addition, nine new metropolitan authorities were created, including Turin, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Bari, Naples, and Cagliari. A further Constitutional Law, passed in October 2001, gave formal recognition to the metropolitan cities as an autonomous level of government

under Title V of the Italian Constitution—the first time a new tier of government has been constitutionally recognized since the birth of the Republic in 1948. However, it was not until the law on fiscal federalism was passed in 2009 (Law 42/2009) that metropolitan government was provided with the necessary finance to assume the range of responsibilities that its expanded powers and territories would require. In the same year, Reggio Calabria was instituted as a metropolitan city by the Berlusconi government, taking the number of officially designated “city-regions” to ten.

Under the original legislation, the implementation of the new metropolitan authorities required the *voluntary* agreement of the provincial capital, the province, and the surrounding (generally smaller) communes that would eventually form part of the *città metropolitana* (metropolitan city). L.265/99 disposed with the requirement for the metropolitan city and the province in which it is based to reach an accord, but neither was the establishment of a metropolitan authority to be mandatory. Instead, the host region, the major city commune and its surrounding local authorities, had the power to define a “wide area” metropolitan government boundary through mutual agreement.

One of the last acts of the centre-left government led by Massimo D'Alema was to pass a constitutional law in March 2001 (by all of four votes) which, because it altered the provisions of the Constitution without a two-thirds majority from each Chamber, had to be subject to a popular referendum in order for the Act to be brought into force. In essence, the legislation, which was approved after the success of the referendum held on October 7, 2001, consolidated and gave constitutional status to the reforms of local and regional government that had been introduced since 1990. The most important constitutional and jurisdictional innovation was the establishment of the principle of subsidiarity as a basis of the framework of government, which brought to an end a great deal of the supervisory powers of central government and the courts on sub-national administration.

However, the reform also represented a hurried measure by the government in the run-up to the May 2001 elections in order to show the electorate of the north, which had voted the Northern League and its allies in Berlusconi's Forza Italia into power in a majority of regional governments, that it was doing something about delivering federal reform. Perhaps reflecting the haste in which it was pushed through, the constitutional reform lacked, as Anna Cento Bull observed, a “clear-cut division of tasks and responsibilities” and seemed likely to give rise to “conflict between the different levels of government” (Cento Bull, 2002: 188).

With the passing of Constitutional Law 1/1999 and Constitutional Law 3/2001, together with ordinary laws 59/1997 and decree law 56/2000, the institutional architecture of sub-national government in Italy was significantly refashioned. Legislation passed in 1999 established the direct election of the regional president (or rather it granted regional councils the powers to choose this form of election), and the 2001 constitutional law gave regions default responsibility for policy areas (either exclusively or concurrently) with central government other than those specifically excluded in the Act (such as defence, immigration, public order, etc.). Article 118 of Constitutional Law 3/2001 also applied the principle of subsidiarity to municipalities, giving them responsibility for functions other than those directly attributed to the state, regions or provinces (Clarich and Pisaneschi 2001: 365).

The reforms of the centre-left Ulivo (Olive Tree) government could be defined as a period of “permissive decentralization” in that it was left to the regions and sub-regional authorities to decide how far and how fast they wished to use the new powers granted them by the ordinary and constitutional reforms. The legislation also gave regions more control over the distribution of decentralized funding under legislative decree 112/1998, and an early analysis of regional spending found that the regions were very reluctant to embrace fiscal federalism in their own jurisdiction with on average three-quarters of funding being held by the region, 22% being devolved to provincial governments and only 1.2% to the communes (Santori 2000).

La Devolution

The emergence, for the first time since the Second World War, of “alternation” in Italian national government has made for a febrile atmosphere in the context of sub-national governance reform. Italy’s rapidly re-modelled party system produced a centre-right government in 1993 under Silvio Berlusconi, followed by a centre-left government in 1996 initially under Romano Prodi, the return of a Berlusconi-led coalition in 2001, and a narrow victory of the centre-left in 2006 which led to premature elections and the return of Berlusconi in 2008 until his forced exit in November 2011. Within the centre-right coalition, long-standing ideological differences between the ethno-nationalist Lega Nord is in stark contrast to the ultra-nationalism of the now disbanded “post-fascist” Alleanza Nazionale party, for whom the unity of Italy and a hostility to local and regional autonomy have long been a *sine qua non* of Gianfranco Fini’s political strategy. Fini’s opposition to federalism of a North American or

even German stamp explains in large measure the fairly modest transfer of central government policy responsibilities to the regions under the 2001–2006 Berlusconi government, despite the fact that Umberto Bossi was nominally in charge of institutional reform and “la devolution.” Health care responsibilities had been transferred to regional governments as far back as 1976, and the 2001 reform really represented a completion of this process. The inclusion of community policing and vocational training as the second and third planks of the reform could hardly be compared even to the devolution reforms of Tony Blair’s government that saw the creation of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly at the end of the 1990s.

With the election of the Casa delle Libertà (House of Freedom) coalition in May 2001, the new minister for Institutional Reform and leader of the Lega Nord, Umberto Bossi, made it clear that in exchange for his party’s support, he wished to see the question of “devolution” resolved in two ways. First, he intended to make the newly strengthened regional authorities the sole vehicle for the “Decalogue of devolution reforms” his government intended to pilot through parliament. Second, Bossi intended to overcome power-sharing disputes by decentralizing the entire responsibility for certain policy areas to the regions. What Bossi’s reforms deliberately lacked were enhanced powers and funding for the larger metropolitan authorities, which, even in the northern regions, were prone to electing centre-left governments and thus challenging the authority of incumbent centre-right regional governors over matters such as health services, transport infrastructure, and economic development.

Instead, Bossi’s constitutional reform proposals were aimed at strengthening the “region at large” where Italy’s more conservative voters were concentrated in the smaller communes and less densely populated provinces. These included measures to provide a new organization for the Constitutional Court that “takes account of regional realities,” the extension of parliamentary immunity to regional councillors and presidents, the reform of administrative justice, and the institution of a “Chamber of Autonomies,” which would be similar to the German Bundesrat and in effect replace the existing Senate. In addition, there would be five “ordinary bills” related to the financing of local government, the limitation of substitutive powers on the part of the national government in relation to local authorities, the participation of the regions in European Union deliberations, international agreements, and the functions of the parliamentary commission for the regions.

The specific responsibilities for which the regions were to be granted exclusive legislative competence included traditional policy areas such as health services, but also school provision and vocational training (although a national curriculum and a national examination system were to be retained), together with local policing. “Our federalism,” stated Bossi in his speech to the Senate at the launch of the Bill, “is founded on the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy,” [source needed](#) which was a far cry from his demand for an “Independent Padania” during the Lega’s secessionist phase. It represented a return to the party’s federalist stance, on which the Northern League had built its early successes in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Diamanti) and from which it had shied away in the latter half of the decade following the (at least superficial) adoption of pro-federalist positions by most of the other parties on both left and right.

With the passing of the devolution bill as part of the Berlusconi-led House of Freedom coalition’s constitutional package in the Senate on March 23, 2005, the Northern League was on the brink of achieving a significant degree of autonomy for the regions, including, crucially, the ability to retain a large proportion of tax receipts at the local level. However, Italy’s voters rejected the constitutional bill in the referendum held in June 2006. The degree of opposition or support for the Northern League’s “devolution max” proposals reflected the perceptions of those who stood to gain or lose most through fiscal federalism. Northern regions that are net contributors to the national budget, such as the Veneto, voted in favour by a margin of 55.3%, whereas in the southern region of Calabria, which relies on substantial subsidies from Rome, 82% of voters opposed the measure. The so-called “fiscal federalism” reforms of the 2009–2011 period were meant to implement Article 119 of the constitution, but, as Massetti and Sandri write, although the reforms “enhanced the fiscal powers of the regions,” the paradoxical change of the Berlusconi government’s intervention was to “[compress] their overall financial capacity” (Massetti and Sandri 2012: 6). Indeed from 2008 onwards there has been a move to provide “standard cost of program delivery” financing for services such as health and education based on the expenditures of the most efficient regions. This tends to penalise the less efficient regional and municipal governments of the south, which is why the government was forced to implement a five-year transition arrangement in order to soften the blow of sharply reduced financial support to these regions.

Regional Economic Spaces and Territorial Governance

Traditionally, national governments had been content to deal directly with the major national employers when discussing economic strategy and support for industry, but from the 1970s the SME sector of “the Third Italy” (the centre-north and northeast) became increasingly important for the country’s export-led growth. Smaller firms are traditionally more reliant on locally provided services and infrastructure than large multinational conglomerates, but in many cases regional and local governments lacked the expertise and resources to support their burgeoning industrial districts adequately. Although in the case of Emilia-Romagna, the left-controlled regional government had proved very capable at providing collective services for small industries, the same could not be said of the Christian Democrats and their governing partners in regions of the “white” subculture such as the Veneto (Cooke and Morgan 1998). At the same time, as the welfare state functions of local authorities continued to develop, there was a growing consensus in the 1980s that relations between local authorities and other public authorities and voluntary agencies needed to be better coordinated and professionalized at subnational level. The creation of “Territorial Pacts” between the various economic actors and public authorities operating at the local and regional level represented a concrete expression of the national government’s response to these demands, although the results were uneven across Italy as a whole (De Rita and Bonomi 1998).

Some commentators have seen regional government in Italy as an endogenous institutional fix for policy failure at the national level, often taking at face value the existence of “institutionally thick” regional governments and strong regional economies, as if the two are necessarily and causally related (Putnam 1993). But the impressive take-off of the small and medium firm sector in the “Third Italy” regions of Marche, Umbria, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia took place at a time in the 1970s when regional government was barely functional. Thus Rodríguez-Pose’s claim that the granting of autonomy to the (ordinary) regions in 1970 led to “the setting up of regional institutions and policies which are at the base of the success of some of the local systems of governance” (2001: 30) fails to recognize that with the possible exception of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, regional administrations have been far less important than trade associations and municipal authorities in stimulating economic growth and enterprise in the Third Italy. For example, the Veneto region, which has enjoyed some of the highest regional growth rates in Italy and which is home to some of the world’s most

successful companies (such as Benetton and Luxottica), had not even officially defined its industrial districts by the end of the 1990s.

There is also no evidence, in the case of Italy at least, that organized business interests have a clear notion of what the best spatial fix for enterprise should be in the context of the devolution reform process. Large-scale Italian capital has until very recently been able mostly to ignore local and regional government, since key policy decisions regarding wages and employment, corporate taxation, competition policy, interest rates, credit, and overseas trade are decided in Rome or Brussels. Up until recently the main employers' organization, Confindustria, has therefore adopted an essentially agnostic stance on the subject of federalism and devolution, preferring to respond only to reform proposals that are seen to be inimical to its specific interests. However, Italian business leaders are increasingly waking up to the fact that fiscal federalism threatens their special relationship with Rome as the national government begins to lose its monopoly over key policy areas, while Italy's weakened position in the Eurozone following the fiscal crisis of 2008 and the country's growing debt problem has undermined the capacity of Italy's banks and major companies to dictate terms to economic policy-makers. Indeed the former head of Confindustria and President of Ferrari, Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, publicly criticized the Berlusconi-Bossi devolution process as a costly "mess" that would create more needless bureaucracy and increase costs to business (L'Espresso 2005).

The Birth of the Metropolitan City

Since the decentralization reforms of the 1990s and 2000s, metropolitan mayors have enjoyed increased public profiles and lengthier tenures. Before the system was reformed, the average Italian mayor remained in office for a mere thirteen months. In 1997, by contrast, all those elected four years previously in the larger Italian cities were still in power. If we consider that during the same period, Italy had four different governments, this appears to indicate a break with the pattern of instability that for decades had linked local and national levels of government in Italy. The meteoric rise of Matteo Renzi, the youthful former mayor of Florence, to the head of Italy's centre-left coalition national government in 2014, has re-focussed attention on the importance of city-regions as power bases for ambitious political leaders. Greater regional autonomy and a more executive-style mayoralty in Italy's larger cities have created new incentives and opportunities for local political actors who realize the importance of territorial affinity and the potential for achieving significant reforms at the

institutional and policy levels in a more devolved, sub-national polity.

It was therefore no surprise that soon into Renzi's tenure as premier, the Italian parliament approved a law named after its ministerial sponsor and former mayor of Reggio Emilia, Graziano Delrio, which brought into being for the first time ten new metropolitan cities—Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Bari, Naples, and Reggio Calabria. As the national capital, Rome is provided with its own institutional arrangements that differ from the other metropolitan cities. Reggio Calabria's metropolitan authority will not be instituted until 2016, when the provincial council ends its mandate. The previously existing provinces which once provided the equivalent to county government are incorporated territorially and administratively within these new metropolitan authorities. Rather than being directly elected by the residents of the province, under the new reform the president of the province and the provincial executive are elected by the mayors and councillors of the constituent provinces. The existing mayor of the largest city authority automatically becomes “mayor of the metropolitan city”—a type of super-mayor who is expected to work with a metropolitan council directly elected by the mayors and councillors of the component municipal authorities. The mayors of the existing provincial municipalities also constitute a “metropolitan conference,” but seemingly with advisory powers only.

Having been initiated by the “Spending Review” Law 135 of 2012 aimed at curbing Italy's budget deficit in line with its European Union Stability Pact obligations, Renzi's local government reforms are intended to produce a more efficient integration of services, transport, and infrastructure while professionalising the public administration by, for example, removing political appointees from departmental executive roles and winding up agencies and local bodies that no longer serve a useful function. An explicit aim of the reform is to allow Italy's major cities to develop more effective institutional arrangements with other European cities and city-regions.³ The act also transformed Italy's provinces from directly-elected bodies to “wide area territorial authorities” (*enti territoriali di area vasta*) with the president of the province now elected by the mayors and the councillors of the component municipalities.⁴

This metropolitanization of the provinces with major urban centres has not been without its controversies or conflicts, however. For example, a number of local authorities surrounding the pre-existing commune of Venice tried unsuccessfully to escape incorporation into the new metropolitan authority which has been criticized for failing to align with the de facto PaTreVe (Padua-Treviso-Venezia) city-region and for a lack of strategic thinking (Messina 2013). Other experiences have been more positive,

such as in the case of the “Milano Città Metropolitana” initiative launched by the existing Milan city authority in the run up to the official creation of the metropolitan authorities. This consultation involved an integrated series of projects and public events involving local stakeholders from the city's universities to the provincial authority and local citizens' groups looking at issues such as the judicial and administrative features of the new statute, land use planning, local economic development, and the re-organization of public services.⁵ Bologna, the capital of the Emilia-Romagna, which historically has pioneered pro-citizen local government reform and decentralization (Parker 1992) has been at the forefront of public participation initiatives surrounding the introduction of the new metropolitan statute in January 2014. The component authorities in the province of Bologna organized a series of virtual and conventional “Town Meetings” with the support of the regional government and twenty local authority and civil society organizations facilitated by “Laboratorio Urbano” (Urban Laboratory) in line with a regional law requiring the direct participation of citizens and civic associations. As a result of this unprecedented consultation with civic groups, third sector organizations, business associations, and key local government bodies, the City Council of Bologna agreed to suspend its deliberations on the new metropolitan statute until the final document from the public consultation process has been published.⁶

As well as technical and functional requirements that every metropolitan statute must feature (such as how the authority will be organized, what powers will its different bodies enjoy, what coordination mechanisms will be in place to deliver services across the territory, etc.) the Delrio law provides for “facultative content” including the fundamental principles on which the new metropolitan authority bases its governing practice, such as, for example, in the case of Bologna, “solidarity, simplification, impartiality, tolerance, integration,” which allows each metropolitan city to constitutionalize to a degree its civic ethos and its relationship to the region, to the nation, and to the European Union.

Conclusion

The absent guests in many discussions of the re-scaling of the state are often the political actors who are charged with giving some coherence and vision to the institutional, social, and economic challenges that their cities and regions face in an increasingly uncertain world. Paolo Perulli acknowledges this aspect of regionalism when he writes that “... the regional dimension ... appears ... as a response to a problem of legitimacy and

representation and not only in functional terms as one of economic structure” (Perulli 1998: 34). This view is echoed by Alan Pred, who argues that the “historical unfolding of local civil society has a certain degree of autonomy,” due to the “locally singular combination of presences and absences, the locally peculiar sedimentation of practical and discursive knowledge, of commonsense, of behavioural dispositions and coping mechanisms” (Pred 1989: 218 in Amin and Thrift 1994: 7).

Neil Brenner also acknowledges the role of political actors, but essentially as reactive agents of “global spatial restructuring” (1999), ascribing variety in the response to globalization at the city or regional level substantially to “... the territorial structure of state power” in each respective country (Brenner 1997). This vaunting of the “spatial fix” (Harvey 1982) or “spatio-temporal fix” (Jessop 2000, 2001) in terms of the logic of capitalist accumulation—what might be called “the re-scaling for capital thesis”—underplays the socio-cultural motifs of territorial identities and what Gramsci termed the hegemonic repertoires of “the historic bloc” in establishing, maintaining, and defending political legitimation (Gramsci, 1971). Crucially, it also overplays and over-generalizes the “steering capacity” of governance under capitalism, ascribing to sub-national state bodies the ability and the will to offer local level Keynesian solutions to the supply-side problems engendered by the withdrawal of the (ubiquitous) neo-liberal nation state from direct economic intervention (Jessop 2000: 335).

Andrew Jonas endorses Kevin Cox’s suggestion “that more work needs to be done on showing how territorial politics are constitutive of state restructuring and rescaling rather than the other way round.” In his own study of New Regionalism in California with Pincetl (2006), Jonas also argues that “the rescaling of the state and governance around regions could be as much a strategic “bottom-up” outcome of organized business interests as it is a solution which is pursued in a unidirectional “top-down” fashion by (central) state interests” (Jonas 2012: 269). The same holds true for the halting and partial nature of devolution in Italy after 1948, where despite the arrival of populist ethno-regionalist parties such as the Lega Nord in the 1990s, a nationally territorialized and orientated party system has successfully guarded its monopoly of power against the decentralising demands of a weakly organized metropolitan-regional polity.

With the election of the coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi in 2001 and its intention to introduce “la devolution,” the institutional reform process appeared to be leading Italy toward a quasi-federalist system at the regional level. A stance in keeping with a broadly neo-liberal approach

that favours greater sub-national self-determination and less reliance upon redistribution from “strong” to “weak” localities and regions. However, as I hope to have shown, the re-territorialization of government in Italy has been, and continues to be, more powerfully shaped by factors internal to its rigidly tribal politics than by external economic and political imperatives such as globalization and the exigencies of the European Union integration process. The Italian case of state restructuring is more consistent with a crisis of legitimacy of the governing class and the party system than the re-scaling imperatives of neo-liberalism, and as such needs to be understood in its historical and political context.

As with other movements for local and regional autonomy in Europe and North America, regionalist and autonomist support increasingly highlights cross-party *resistance* to the depoliticizing and centralizing operations of international government-finance coalitions such as the EU/IMF's austerity-imposing Troika. A case in point is Italian comedian Beppe Grillo's highly successful anti-big capital/big government Five Star citizen's movement, which won a quarter of the popular vote in the Italian parliamentary elections in February 2013, and which has identified radical plans for the overhaul of territorial government, including the abolition of the provinces and the amalgamation of communes under 5,000 inhabitants. Ironically, so-called anti-establishment political movements such as the Lega Nord and Five Star achieved their initial success at the head of city administrations, which had enjoyed greatly increased powers and financial autonomy due to the reforms of the mainstream parties.

The re-scaling of governance in Italy does engage, albeit largely rhetorically, with new public management and new institutionalist arguments around the more efficient management of cities and regions as distinct economic spaces, but in the absence of strong backing from regional and national economic elites, such policy-driven new regionalist arguments have never carried much sway. Thus while the “spending review” law allowing for the introduction of city-regions and the reduction in the number of provinces draws on the language of modernization and the control of public expenditure, in reality the long resisted rise of metropolitan government (like that of the regions before them) is a sign of the continuing sclerosis of the Italian political system.

In so far as Italy's territorial government reforms represent a further attempt at territorial re-scaling, it is certainly being generated less from the logic circuits of global capital and more from globalization's populist antinomies in civil society that are seeking to control and “re-humanise” state-capital power ensembles in a more localist, and according to critics,

chauvinist-populist, direction.⁷ Thus, in the context of Italy, regionalization and metropolitanization can be seen as essentially political struggles that invoke the chimeras of globalization and Europeanization in the name of what remains a fundamentally partisan contest for all scales of governance in Italy.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Duncan McDonnell for contributing to an earlier unpublished paper on which this chapter partially draws.
- 2 A Demopolis poll for the Catholic periodical 'Famiglia Cristiana' conducted in November 2011 found that only 19% of voters had faith in the Berlusconi government and 33% in the mayor of their city. Support for the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano ran at 82%, for the police 67%, for the Church 60%, for magistrates 54%, for schools and universities 51% and for the European Union 42%. A survey for the newspaper 'Sole 24 Ore' conducted in 2008 found that support for the mayor of Italy's principal cities averaged 55% with 91 mayors doing better than 50% satisfaction (Burroni et al., 2009: 1).
- 3 'Città metropolitane, province, unione di comuni: in vigore la legge Delrio' at www.governo.it/governoinforma/dossier/legge_province/
- 4 The Renzi government claims to have saved over €100 million from abandoning direct elections to the Provincial authorities.
- 5 Urbanistica Informazioni, 245–46, 2012, p. 36.
- 6 *Lo statuto della città metropolitana di bologna per la convivenza e la democrazia deliberativa*, Bologna, 2014. www.bolognametropolitana.org/
- 7 Wu Ming Foundation, "Grillismo: Yet another right-wing cult coming from Italy," March 8, 2013. www.wumingfoundation.com/english/wumingblog/?p=1950 Accessed August 4, 2013.

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